

Basic Elements of a Medical Word


1. Word Root
2. Combining Form
3. Suffix
4. Prefix

These four parts of a word are known as
ELEMENTS.

Word Root

- Main part or foundation of a word.
- All words have at least one word root.
- A word root may be used alone or combined with other elements to form a complete word.

IE: SPEAK (word root) + ER (suffix) =
SPEAKER (complete word)

- 
- The word root usually refers to a body part.
 - Some root words are derived from the Latin or Greek language.

Word Root Examples

- “dent” means tooth
- “dermat” means skin
- “cardi” means heart
- “gastr” means stomach
- “pancreat” means pancreas

Combining Forms

- Correct pronunciation of medical words is important.
- In order to make the pronunciation of word roots easier, sometimes it is necessary to insert a vowel after the root.
- The combination of a word root and a vowel is known as a **COMBINING FORM**.

- Combining forms consist of a combining vowel.
- The combining vowel is usually an “o”, but others may be used.

IE: gastr / o pronounced GASTRO.

↑
Word root

↑
Combining vowel

Word-Building System

- By understanding the meanings of word roots, one can determine the meaning of complex medical terms by putting together the smaller parts.

Leukocytopenia

Word Roots: Leuk / (white)

cyt / (cell)

Combining Vowel / o /

Suffix: / penia (decrease)

Suffixes

- A suffix is added to the END of a word root or combining form to modify its meaning.
- By adding a suffix to the end of a word root, we create a noun or adjective with a different meaning.

- A combining vowel is used between a word root and a suffix that begins with a consonant (not a vowel).
- This is to make pronunciation easier.

Word root: scler / (hardening)

Suffix: / derma (skin)

Term: Scler / o / derma (hardening of the skin)

↑
Combining vowel

REVIEW

- A combining vowel ***IS*** used to link one root to another root, and before a suffix that begins with a consonant.
- A combining vowel ***IS NOT*** used before a suffix that begins with a vowel.

Prefixes

- A prefix is a syllable or syllables placed BEFORE a word or word root to alter its meaning or create a new word.

Some prefixes:

Hyper- (excessive)

Pre- (before)

Post- (after)

Homo- (same)

Hypo- (under)

Hypoinsulinemia

Hypo / insulin / emia

Prefix

Word root

suffix

LOW

INSULIN

BLOOD

Notice that there is no combining vowel in this word because the prefix ends with a vowel and the suffix begins with a vowel.